

Address By

DR. LOUIS A. WARREN

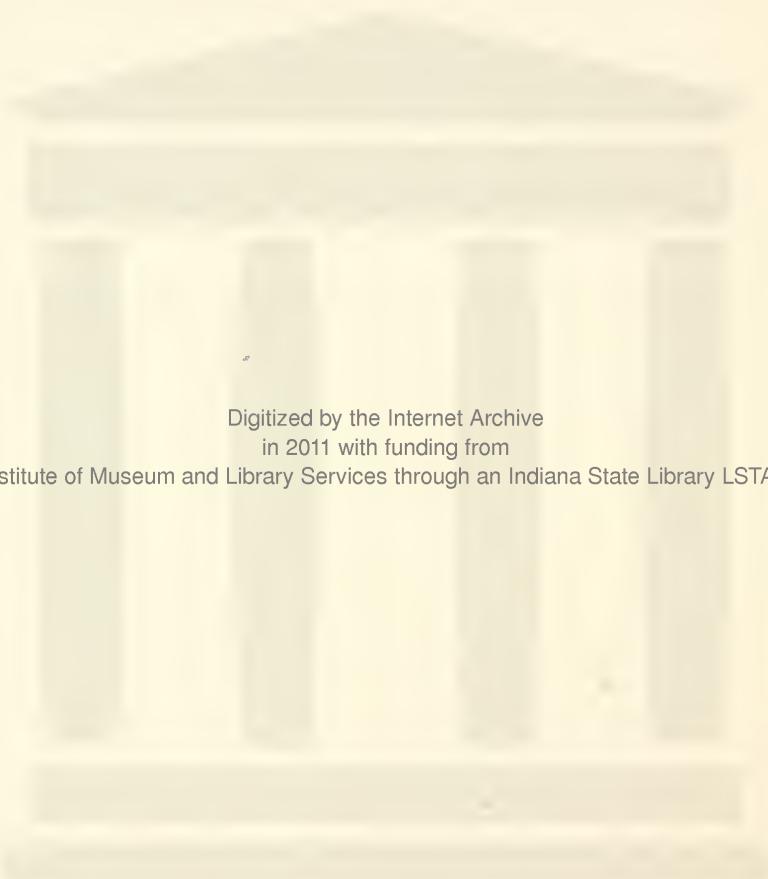
Director, Lincoln National Foundation

Before

Joint Convention of the Michigan

Legislature

February 8, 1956



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

Foreword

BY

HON. LOUIS C. CRAMTON
Representative from Lapeer County

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Boy Scouts, Members of the Senate and House of Representatives:

Abraham Lincoln was born on the twelfth day of February, 1809. The 147th anniversary of that great event is at hand. Ninety years have passed since his tragic death but through all the World there is today deep interest in him, his acts and his writings. Through this Joint Session of the Senate and House of Representatives, the state of Michigan today pays tribute to his memory. We are fortunate to have with us today one of the most distinguished Lincoln scholars of the Nation, Dr. Louis A. Warren.

Dr. Warren for several years lived in Kentucky near the birthplace of Lincoln, where he edited a newspaper and wrote the first of his many Lincoln books, "Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood". Now residing in Indiana, he serves on the State Library and Historical Bureau. He is the Director of the Lincoln National Foundation. For 26 years he has edited "Lincoln Lore", a bulletin exclusively Lincoln, appearing each week. In my attempts at the study of Lincoln, what he stood for, I have been greatly aided, as have thousands of others throughout the country, in their Lincoln studies through their reading of "Lincoln Lore". As Director of the Lincoln National Foundation at Fort Wayne, he has gathered the largest collection of literature ever assembled about one man, biblical characters excepted. The books and pamphlets, exclusively Lincoln, in that collection number nearly 9,000 volumes. The Foundation is known as the center of Lincoln information in America. It is an honor, a privilege, that has been granted me to present to you Dr. Louis A. Warren. Dr. Warren.

Mr. Cramton, Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Speaker, Boy Scouts, Members of the Senate and House of Representatives and visitors:

There has been inscribed on an interior wall of one of our mid-western University buildings the names of five great World figures. The name of Christ stands in a line by itself. Underneath it are these four names: Aristotle, the first man who began to systematize thinking; Galileo, the father of modern science, the father of the day in which we live; Shakespeare and Lincoln. Here we have represented religion, philosophy, science, literature and government. I think you may feel that possibly Lincoln might be out of place in such an illustrious group. Who is responsible for such a selection? You will say, do not immortal men usually come from old civilizations? And how does it happen that a young Nation like ours could nominate a man to stand among the great?

Well, the list in reality came from a group selected by H. G. Wells, the English historian, so it was not a provincial American selection. I think possibly you may recall that Wells, passing away but a few years ago, had been called the outstanding World historian. He felt that Lincoln should occupy a place among the great.

The next question you would want to ask is this one, why is Lincoln great? Well, of course, his humble birth had something to do with it, and certainly the great tragedy of his death. But I think we can discover some contributions that would possibly be a good argument for placing him among the illustrious men of all times. I would say first of all his profound statesmanship. As I have already indicated, he represents government in the list of five professions. I do not think there is any doubt but what it was Lincoln who saved the Union. For instance, the South was fighting to get out of the Union, attempting to break it up. The Northern abolitionists were saying, "good riddance" to the South, "Let her go". The cabinet members were feeling that possibly the quickest way out of all the difficulty would be to let the South set up her own government, and even some of the generals were not fighting for victories; they were looking for compromise. You might say that Lincoln stood almost alone in his persevering to save the Union. He had taken an oath that he would, to the best of his ability, do what he could to save the Union. I think historians are agreed that, almost standing there alone, it was his great passion for the Union that kept us together. That contribution in itself was undoubtedly the finest contribution made to our American civilization—the preservation of the Union.

I think possibly another contribution might be called his humanitarian measures. Is there anyone who would question the far-reaching effects of the Emancipation Proclamation? All students know that it was Lincoln's own work. He didn't even take his Cabinet into his confidence. He has been called the savior of a race. That gave him something of an

international aspect over against the national contribution of saving the Union.

We are just now beginning to appreciate what wonderful leadership Lincoln gave us in the Civil War and a recent book published by Colonel Ballard of England, sets Lincoln apart as a military genius—an entirely new approach to Lincoln's greatness. In this book published by this professor of the London Military College he clearly sets forth the military genius of Lincoln as the most important factor in the great struggle.

Then, no one questions Lincoln's literary genius. You men, time and time again, have used excerpts from his speeches. Lincoln is more often quoted than any other American figure. And then there is also his exemplary character. Have we ever had a statesman comparable to Lincoln as far as his personal character is concerned? His integrity, his courage, his patience, his sympathy, and we might go on through the whole category of virtues which seem to be combined in him. As someone said, "As his powers grew greater, he became more humble".

Now among these various contributions to Lincoln's greatness, if you think these five elements would set him apart and there are others that might be mentioned, possibly we should select one of them which we might canvass more thoroughly this afternoon.

I am sure you have observed that most of these contributions which allowed Lincoln to be set apart as a great character were made after he became President, so it was quite necessary for him to attain the Presidency before these other contributions could be achieved. It appears to me that we might talk about Lincoln's literary excellency and especially give emphasis to his rhetoric or to his eloquence because we are all willing to admit that Lincoln gained the Presidency perhaps primarily through his ability to talk and through his ability to influence people through his oratory. Fine as his ideas may have been, unless he had had that remarkable gift of eloquence, it is impossible to think of him rising as he did. So perhaps our task will be to try and understand, if we may, how Lincoln did achieve in the field of oratory.

Lord Curzon, who for 25 years was a Chancellor of Oxford University, made a speech before the Oxford students on one occasion and came to a conclusion something like this. He said in my way of thinking there have been three great orations which have been delivered in the Anglo-Saxon tongue: one by the younger Pitt after the victory at Trafalgar; the other two by an American, Abraham Lincoln—the second inaugural address and the Gettysburg address. Lord Curzon was a leading literary authority of Great Britain for 25 years and here he feels, as he concluded his address, that Lincoln's address at Gettysburg was the most sublime piece of eloquence ever spoken in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. That was quite a fine compliment from an English Lord who was an authority in the field of literature.

Now we are immediately asking ourselves this question, how could a boy born in a humble log cabin in Kentucky with no cultural surroundings, with no formal education to amount to anything, come to a time when he would speak more eloquently than any other man had spoken in his language? Now you see that is the problem which we have before us. But I think it can be solved. We would have to start early with what we might call the primary contributions to the Gettysburg address. What were the primary contributions to the Gettysburg address? Lincoln said on one occasion, "My mother was a ready reader and read the Bible to me habitually". That would not be strange for a pioneer day because very often the Bible was the only book in the cabin home. The Bible was a sort of a text book of the whole community. The children learned their reading and spelling out of it. Lincoln learned something else, something even more than character study—he learned the beauty of the King James' version, that is the simplicity of its English. As he heard his mother read day by day and as he began to read for himself he was found expressing himself in biblical lore, in language very much like the characters of the Bible used. When he made the greatest of all his political speeches at Cooper Institute, which put him on the road to the presidency, one editor went back to his editorial desk and wrote, "I have just heard the greatest man who has lived since the days of St. Paul". In other words, there was something peculiar in the presentation of his political speech that made this editor feel that he had been listening to a biblical character. And so it was through his life. The second inaugural address which I have already mentioned and which Lord Curzon felt to be almost equal to the Gettysburg address and perhaps the shortest of all inaugural addresses, save one, contained 14 references to deity, three references to prayer, and three complete biblical quotations. Lincoln students call the second inaugural Lincoln's "sermon on the mount" because of the christian philosophy which it expresses.

And so I think in these very few moments we have discovered where the beauty of Lincoln's diction came from; it came from the simple readings of his mother. I'm very sure that if we are familiar with the writings of Lincoln we will be led many times into passages and paragraphs which make us feel we are reading excerpts from the Bible because of the simple diction which Lincoln uses. I need not emphasize, I am sure, the field of letters with the remarkable notes of consolation which he wrote to the Widow Bixby and to Colonel Ellsworth's parents and others. We are all, I think, willing to agree that Lincoln excelled in his method of expressing himself.

Well, this will start us at least to understand the Gettysburg address. But it took something more than good diction to give the Gettysburg address. Lincoln's stepmother made a little contribution although she may not have thought very much about it at the time. You will recall that Lincoln's mother died when he was nine years of age. A couple of

years later a stepmother came into his home and brought with her from Kentucky, along with her three children by her first husband, some books that her children had used in the Elizabethtown Academy. One of the books she brought with her was "Scott's Lessons in Elocution". You can imagine what a book-hungry boy like Lincoln would do with a book of that type. Possibly the best part of that book was the appendix which contained 300 pages of the World's best literature; fine Shakespearean soliloquies and orations of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Lincoln memorized some of these remarkable speeches. Remember the Greeks were the first ones to dabble a little bit in democracy and there Lincoln learned at first hand this unique form of government. And so when a piece of prose or poetry was ready, well, he always had an audience on tap to practice on because there were the widow Johnson's three children—Lincoln had a sister two years older than himself—and another orphaned boy had been brought into the cabin—so there were six children growing up together in the Lincoln cabin. And so when a speech was ready Lincoln would have these kids seated on a fallen tree out in the yard of the home somewhere and then, getting on a stump, he would give them what he might have memorized. Two of those children have left reminiscences of those early days and told us how Lincoln practiced on them all those early years. And so he got off to a pretty good start as a public speaker, even as a very small boy. Oh, after his speeches became perhaps more informal he would call the farmer boys in from the adjacent farms and give them a political speech; it might have been one on Henry Clay because Henry Clay was his great boyhood ideal as a statesman.

But I guess it takes more than good diction and training in public speaking even to give a Gettysburg address. Lincoln had to have something to say that was his very own, something that he had composed. He tells us about that himself. He was on his way to be inaugurated President and he stopped at Trenton, New Jersey, to address the Legislature. He said, "I'm deeply moved by being here. 'Way back in my youth when I first began to read, I got hold of a small book, Weems' 'Life of Washington'." Then he went on to tell the Legislature about how deeply the book had impressed him. He said, "especially do I remember the crossing of the Delaware with the flow of ice in it, the contest with the Hessians here on the streets of Trenton. These revolutionary episodes were more deeply impressed upon my mind than others". And then Lincoln made this remarkable statement. I cannot conceive of any 12-year-old boy having a conception of the country as Lincoln had at 12 years of age. This is what he said and I quote him verbatim. After telling about reading Weems' Washington, he said, "I remember thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something out of common for which the fathers of the country fought, something more than the national independence, something

that held out a great hope to all the World for all future time to come." Can you imagine a 12-year-old boy having a view of his country like that? Even then, democracy was a superior form of government; that under it we had experienced more happiness; that we had also experienced more prosperity than anybody else.

A hundred years ago this August, Lincoln gave a speech in Michigan and I understand down at Kalamazoo they're going to celebrate that occasion. He made the same comment there, "Where is there a Nation that has seen the prosperity and the happiness that America has seen?" So here we have discovered in this little story of Washington the essence of his entire political philosophy, the superiority of democracy over any other form of government and he felt, given a fair chance and a good demonstration of it, the whole World would want to accept it. I firmly believe that Lincoln died believing that some day we would have a great World democracy.

Well, now we have a theme for his oration, good diction, training in public speaking and also a great passion in his heart for his country. Now we have him ready. At 21 years of age he is prepared. But it was a long period of training that he faced. At 21 years of age he moved into Illinois. He settled eight miles west of Decatur. Shortly after he arrived there, there was public speaking going on at Decatur and his friend, John Hanks, said let's go over there and hear the speakers. They walked the eight miles into Decatur. Two candidates for the Illinois Legislature were speaking and after they were through John Hanks got on the stump and said, "I've got a friend, recently over from Indiana, who can beat those two speeches all to thunder." And Lincoln got up on the stump and did beat those speeches all to thunder. So interested were the candidates for the Legislature that they said to Lincoln, "Why don't you try out for the Legislature?" And two years later he did.

People who heard Lincoln at 21 years of age in Illinois said, "We have heard Kentucky's great orators, including Henry Clay, but none compared with Lincoln". So here we are starting out at 21 years of age, a man who eventually is to speak at Gettysburg and he has all those years, 32 years, to practice his oratory. Fortunately, he chose politics as his avocation (some people tell me it was, in reality his vocation but we'll call it an avocation) because at 23 years of age he did announce as a candidate for the Legislature. At 25 years of age he was elected to the Legislature and became speaker for the minority group and many, many political honors followed up to the Douglas debates. All during that period he was continually before the people with his oratory. Time and time again we find references to Lincoln as the best "stump speaker" in the West.

Well, he also started to plead law at 28 years of age. Here was another avenue for practice in his oratory—before court and jury—up until the time he was nominated for the Presidency.

So you see this long practice period took this raw boy out of the wilderness and placed him before the people. You might anticipate that perhaps someday with everything just right he might give a great masterpiece and the day came. However, we must remove one little barrier before we discuss the immediate contributions to his address at Gettysburg. I am sorry that I have to introduce into this discussion an early pioneer of Michigan who may have been responsible for the little episode which I am about to relate.

I think perhaps some of you may have read of Anson Burlingame, an early Michigan pioneer who entered the University of Michigan in 1837. After Everett had returned from Gettysburg after his remarkable Gettysburg address, Burlingame was conversing with Everett about Mr. Lincoln's talk and Burlingame's son said that he overheard the conversation. The conversation that he overheard was the background of a book called "The Perfect Tribute", written by Mrs. Andrews in the year 1906. Mrs. Andrews, in her little book, makes the statement based upon the alleged conversation, apparently, and this is what she says, "On the way from Washington down to Gettysburg Lincoln saw on the floor of the railroad train a piece of an old paper sack that someone had discarded and reaching over and tearing off a diagonal piece and with the stub of a lead pencil which he had in his pocket he wrote off the Gettysburg address." Just like that. Strange to say 99 percent of all the people in America believe it. Well, it's difficult to understand how anybody could write on one of those old trains considering the physical approach to it. And we have the positive evidence of John Nickolay, Lincoln's own private secretary, who was with him all the way from Washington to Gettysburg. We have his own testimony in print that Lincoln did not write a word on the train. Of course, masterpieces don't come to us like that. The Gettysburg address was not something hurriedly, hastily or slovenly done.

The Gettysburg address was the work of a lifetime, starting back there, if you please, in the pioneer boyhood days of Lincoln. And we do know, that when Lincoln started to write the preliminary speech there were immediate contributions to the Gettysburg address.

You may recall that the battle of Gettysburg was fought on July 1, 2 and 3, 1863. On the morning of July 4, the birthday of the Nation, Robert Lincoln, the oldest son of the President, came into his father's study and saw Lincoln with his head bowed on the table. He said, "Father, what's the trouble?" Mr. Lincoln replied, "Robert, Meade has failed to follow through at Gettysburg." He said, "The war should have ended yesterday at Gettysburg. Meade, with 20,000 fresh troops coming up to support him and with a victorious Army, Lee, with a defeated Army and the bridges cut down ahead of him that could not be repaired for 48 hours, Meade should have closed in and ended the war." And I think practically every military authority is agreed to that. The war

should have ended at Gettysburg and Mr. Lincoln was greatly pained because it wasn't ended then and he sat down and wrote a letter to General Meade which has been preserved, seriously criticizing General Meade and then he felt later that it was such a fine victory that he possibly shouldn't send the letter.

But it was not the Gettysburg battle that sparked the Gettysburg address. It was another victory. On July 4, the day following the Gettysburg battle, Vicksburg, a great stronghold on the Mississippi, fell to the Union troops. Lincoln didn't learn about it until three days later. Telegraphy hadn't been perfected to such an extent that it is now. But on July 7 he heard about the fall of Vicksburg. And then he made one of the most remarkable utterances of his life. I doubt whether any other man in America could have expressed it as he did. Hearing about the fall of Vicksburg, he said, "And now again the father of waters flows unvexed to the sea".

Lincoln knew that the war was growing to a close. Great crowds milled about the White House that night of July 7 because the citizens of Washington had heard about the Vicksburg victory; they had heard about Gettysburg. They demanded a speech from the President. He came to the balcony and delivered what I like to call his preliminary Gettysburg address. This is the way he started off, "How long ago is it, 80 odd years, since for the first time in history a Nation by its representatives met and declared as a self-evident truth that all men are created equal. That was the birthday of the United States of America". And he went on to tell interesting instances that had occurred on other past Fourths of July. Lincoln was very, very much place and time conscious, especially time conscious. He never forgot his wife's birthday or his own wedding anniversary (and perhaps I might just drop a little note, you men shouldn't forget that St. Valentine's Day is coming up soon). Lincoln never forgot those things. He never forgot the important anniversaries of the country. He said, "Did not Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, and John Adams, who best defended it in debate, did not both of them die on exactly the same day, July the Fourth, just exactly 50 years to the day after the Declaration was signed?" He thought that was a strange coincidence, and you'll admit that it was. He mentioned some other interesting incidents which had happened on other Fourths of July and then he said, "Now on this Fourth of July just passed" and then he told them about the marvelous victory at Vicksburg on the birthday of the Nation and then mentioned the Gettysburg victory as well.

But it was Vicksburg that sparked his address, falling on the birthday of the Nation. And he concluded his little talk with this statement, "This is a fine theme for a speech, this story of the birth of a Nation but I'm not prepared to give one worthy of the occasion". But he was prepared on November 19 at Gettysburg to give one worthy of the occasion and

we are positive that in this interval between July 7th and November 19th, he had been milling over in his mind something that might be said appropriate about the birth of the Nation.

We find in letters that he wrote, in declarations that he made, in proclamations that he issued, statements similar to those that he used in the Gettysburg address, similar to those that he had used on July 7th. This line of thought is continually on his mind during all these months and so he comes to Gettysburg and starts off exactly the same way as he did on July 7th. He didn't say, "How long ago was it, 80 odd years?" Lincoln started something like that at Kalamazoo 100 years ago. He talked about 80 years having passed, now it's 80 odd years. But when he comes to Gettysburg, he doesn't use language of the "stump". Now he uses the language of a literary genius. And this is the way he puts it, "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new Nation". Well, that's just exactly what he was talking about on July 7th, but in more beautiful language. Now the master hand has been at work.

Where did you ever hear the expression "brought forth" except in the story of the Nativity "and Mary brought forth her first born son". "Our fathers brought forth on this continent a new Nation". He had heard his mother read, in the little Kentucky and Indiana cabins, time and time again the story of the Nativity and now he couches this beautiful oration in the language of the Nativity. "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new Nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal". Three times on July 7th he had emphasized the fact that all men are created equal. And then he goes on to further amplify his Nativity theme. He said, "Now we are engaged in a great Civil War testing whether that Nation or any Nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure". Do you remember the story in the Nativity scene where Herod would find out where the young child was that he might destroy him? So Lincoln wonders whether or not the Nation could survive its own domestic foes; its own domestic foes were then trying to destroy the Nation. It was a problem with Lincoln whether it could survive its own domestic foes. And so he goes on with this magnificent address — to borrow from the atmosphere of of Bethlehem, to put over the theme that he is developing. Of course, if it was something hurriedly written, something slovenly done on a railroad train, you might not expect continuity of thought. You might not expect the development of argument. You might expect a few pretty words hitched together — Lincoln could do that. But here we have a tremendous thesis that he is developing—Why are these dead lying here at Gettysburg? Just for one reason, only one, that the Nation might live. That's it. That's why the Civil War was fought — that the Nation might live.

Then he comes to the grand conclusion of his address. You'll recall that he introduces his conclusion in the form of a proposition and says, "we here highly resolve", first, "we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain". That's what he's been talking about, the survival of the Nation. I think he borrowed that little statement from Weems' old book about Washington. Weems says that Washington was riding along one day and saw the graves of some revolutionary soldiers. He drew rein to his horse and said to his attendant, "I trust that some whispering angel has told them that they did not die in vain," and they didn't. The revolutionary fathers did not die in vain. We are the recipients of their sacrifices. Neither did the men at Gettysburg die in vain. The Union was preserved. They accomplished their objective. That would have made a good climax for a speech but it wasn't the climax. Neither do you find the climax of his speech in the often used prepositional phrase.

I heard an outstanding speech in Washington not long ago by one of our great statesmen. It was a very commendable speech, but for me he spoiled it by trying to embellish it by choosing out of the Gettysburg address the prepositional phrase and bellowed it out like a school boy, "government OF the people, BY the people and FOR the people". Of course, Lincoln didn't say it that way. He wouldn't mutilate a magnificent oration by any such demonstration of school boy tactics. Lincoln placed the emphasis on the word "people". Santayana died in Italy not long ago. He will go down as one of the great men of the century, perhaps one of the half dozen great men of the century. Santayana said, "I think my American cousins give a wrong interpretation to Lincoln's Gettysburg address when they emphasize the prepositions". "My feeling", he said, "is that Lincoln placed the emphasis on the word 'people'". I was giving a speech in the Philadelphia Athletic Club one day and, mentioning the prepositions, an old man came up to me and said, "My father heard Lincoln at Gettysburg and father always became greatly irritated when he heard anybody emphasize the propositions". He said, "Lincoln placed the emphasis on the word 'people'".

The Associated Press reporter who took down in shorthand the statements Lincoln made at Gettysburg left some reminiscences in which he said, "Lincoln did not place the emphasis on the prepositions, he placed the emphasis on the word 'people'".

Government of the people. That's what he was talking about. There is no comma after the word "government". Grammatically you can't emphasize the first preposition. Government of the people in its Greek origin, demos cratos — literally translated, the government of the people. And that's what Lincoln had been talking about, the government of the people.

But that is not the climax of the address. The climax of the address is found in that vivid expression which occurs right after he put in two words in the address, the two words "under God". He put them in

there apparently to set off the grand climax of his address. Well, you would anticipate that his climax would bring together the substance and the emphasis of his argument and so he puts in the two words "under God", "That this Nation", that is the Nation that was conceived in liberty, the Nation that the fathers brought forth, the Nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. "This Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom". And that's the climax of the Gettysburg address, alright. There can be no question about it. Oh, we may want to put it somewhere else but there is no question but what Lincoln put it there. Contemporary news accounts definitely state so. General Howard, who dedicated the cornerstone of the Gettysburg monument the following July, said, "And it was here on this very spot that Lincoln gave his address on the new birth of freedom".

Forney of the Philadelphia Times wrote, "already we have begun to experience the new birth of freedom about which Lincoln talked". And even Lincoln's enemies knew what he talked about and one of his opposition papers said editorially the next week, "We don't want a new birth of freedom such as Lincoln talked about at Gettysburg". Can there be any question where the emphasis was? And that changes the whole picture. Lincoln is giving us, in that Gettysburg address, a magnificent interpretation of our government. Not speaking to the people at Gettysburg but speaking to us. In other words, he left us an antidote for sick democracies. He knew that democracies, in order to survive, must continually be reborn, rejuvenated. Democracies are like that. You can't win one battle at Concord or Lexington and preserve democracy forever. Continually we must be alert to protecting our freedoms and our liberties. And I think if Lincoln could give us the Gettysburg address today, he would give it the same emphasis he gave it back there.

We have had brought before us these late years three documents which in some way compare to the Declaration, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. And they are these three. I would use the Gettysburg address as one of them. And then I would also use the "Pledge to the Flag". I find that it was a member of the House of Representatives at Washington and a member of the Senate there from this State, both Representative and Senator, who were responsible three years ago for putting a Bill through that placed the two words "under God" in the pledge to the flag. Michigan may rightly deserve credit for that. And I think the words were picked out of the Gettysburg address and set in there as nicely as they have been and I am glad they are there because they give us a new emphasis to the pledge to the flag, "One Nation, under God, indivisible" and we can no longer slur that word over. I remember hearing children saying long ago, "One Nation indivisible", sort of a slurring — they can't do it now. "One Nation, under God, indivisible" and that's the grand thing about the Nation that it is indivisible.

And then there is one other document and with this I close. We have the address, we have the pledge to the flag and we have a song and I'm sorry we don't sing it more than we do. We let some little ditty get in the way because we think it has more rhythm to it. "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Let music swell the breeze and ring from all the trees sweet freedom's song. From every mountain side let freedom ring. Our Father's God, to thee, author of liberty, to thee I sing. Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light".

